



# PRESS RELEASE

## House Armed Services Committee

### Floyd D. Spence, Chairman

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### **GAO REPORT ON “VOLATILE” BALKANS RAISES FURTHER QUESTIONS ABOUT U.S. MILITARY INVOLVEMENT IN THE REGION**

House Armed Services Committee Chairman Floyd Spence today released a General Accounting Office (GAO) report that describes the security situation in the Balkans as “volatile,” and raises further questions about U.S. military involvement in the region.

According to the GAO (“Balkans Security: Information on Current and Projected Factors Affecting Regional Stability”; GAO/NSIAD-00-125BR), the prospects for peace and stability in the Balkans remain bleak. The report notes, “local political leaders and people of their respective ethnic groups have failed to embrace the political and social reconciliation considered necessary to build multiethnic, democratic societies and institutions.” As a result, “all areas of the Balkans continue to face major unresolved political, social, and other problems that will contribute to regional instability over the next five years.”

In response to the report’s conclusions, Spence said, “The U.S. military’s ‘one-year’ mission in Bosnia has already passed the four-year mark, and now threatens to become a decades-long mission. In 1996, I questioned the wisdom of involving U.S. forces in peacekeeping missions where the United States has no clear national security interests or apparent exit strategy – this report raises further doubts that the U.S. military should be involved in what clearly today is an open-ended mission.”

GAO also reports that, “The continuing hostilities and lack of political and social reconciliation between Kosovar Albanians and non-Albanians have overshadowed positive developments that have occurred in Kosovo since the end of the NATO bombing campaign.” In Bosnia, the report continues, “political leaders of the country’s three major ethnic groups continued to obstruct the implementation of the Dayton Agreement’s political, humanitarian and economic provisions.” In response, Spence stated, “While our military forces have clearly helped avoid an all out conflict in the region, it is unclear whether the United States or NATO can ever reconcile the warring parties in either Kosovo or Bosnia.”

“Considering the increasing level of risk to U.S. military personnel, the lack of a compelling U.S. interest in the Balkans, and GAO’s conclusion that violence in the region is likely to continue or escalate, it is time for our nation to carefully reconsider our involvement in the Bosnia and Kosovo peacekeeping missions,” Spence concluded.

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